



HAWAII'S NEWS CHANNEL

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Pedestrian safety bill zipping through legislature

Gregg Takayama

Hawaii has one of the highest rates of pedestrian casualties in the nation. Alarm over the growing number of pedestrians killed on Hawaii's roads is prompting quick state action.

Lawmakers are moving unusually quickly to approve a new law that protects people trying to get across busy streets.

Pedestrians are tired of risking their lives against drivers.

"The light turns green and they just go and they don't realize that people are trying to walk across the street," said downtown student Sarah Covell.

"We've got seniors, people with little children crossing, and one of these days somebody's going to get killed at one of the corners," said downtown resident Lynne Matusow.

They often do. Hawaii's one of the most deadly states for pedestrians. In 2002, 33 were killed; in 2003 there were 24 death; and last year 30 fatalities.

Casualties are mounting. Just this morning an 82-year-old man suffered critical injuries when he was hit by a truck as he tried to cross Dillingham Boulevard.

Downtown residents say the intersection of Beretania and Nuuanu is especially bad because here pedestrians compete with drivers trying to make right turns.

Lawmakers plan to pass a new law proposed by Gov. Linda Lingle that requires drivers to stop for pedestrians.

"Drivers tend to be very impatient and so they all have to learn to take it easy," said Sen. Lorraine Inouye, chair of the Transportation Committee.

"You got elderly people with canes, walkers, they're trying to compete with the light and the automobiles -- and they lose," said downtown worker Larry Jackson.

It doesn't help that many downtown crosswalk lines are faded so badly they're almost invisible. Walkers ask for just a little more patience by drivers.

"The drivers are just really nasty about it; they're honking; they're making nasty signs at pedestrians, they're telling them get out of the way, we have the right of way," Matusow said.

The proposed new law would require that as soon as anyone steps into a crosswalk, all lanes of traffic in both directions must stop.

The measure has already passed committees in both the House and Senate. That's very rare for so early in the session, so it could soon be heading to the governor.

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